

CITY OF ROCKVILLE LONG RANGE PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

July 31, 2003

SUBJECT:

East Rockville Neighborhood Plan

Location: East Rockville Planning Area (Planning Area 2)

Planning Commission Public Hearing Date: August 6, 2003

Mayor and Council Public Hearing Date: September 15, 2003

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission conduct a public hearing on the East Rockville Neighborhood Plan.



Planning Area Description

The East Rockville neighborhood has been a stable and secure community for many years. Members of the community have expressed a strong connection and identification with the community, in some cases for generations.

With few exceptions, the predominant land use within the community has been single-family homes. Because of the origins of the community in the 1890s, and with home construction occurring primarily in the 1940s and 1950s but continuing through the 1990s, the community has acquired a diversity of home styles and sizes that is unique to Rockville. In many ways this has contributed to the “home-town” neighborhood-feel of the community. In addition, the majority of homes in the neighborhood are owner-occupied, also contributing to the connection and affection that many residents feel for the community.

As defined by the 2002 *Comprehensive Master Plan*, the East Rockville Planning Area (Planning Area 2) is just east of Rockville’s Town Center, and is bounded generally by First

Street/Norbeck Road (MD 28) on the east, Veirs Mill Road on the South, the Stonestreet industrial corridor and Rockville Metro station on the west, and the Lincoln Park neighborhood and Southlawn industrial area on the north. For the purposes of this Neighborhood Plan, the Stonestreet Study Area, which incorporates both the Stonestreet industrial corridor and the eastern portion of the Rockville Metro station, is considered to be part of the East Rockville Planning Area.

The East Rockville residential neighborhoods comprise approximately 333 acres of land. Over 90 percent of the land area is single-family detached homes, totaling 1,009 households. An additional 56 single family attached units (townhouses) are also in the planning area. The planning area population was approximately 3,300 in Census 2000. The Stonestreet corridor includes approximately 33 acres, including the industrial properties on North and South Stonestreet Avenue as well as the eastern portion of the Rockville Metro station.

Planning Process

The Neighborhood Planning process for East Rockville began with a Community Kickoff Meeting for neighborhood residents. City planning staff completed a neighborhood inventory and compiled background information in preparation for the meeting, which was held on April 4, 2002. Approximately 130 residents and property owners attended.

The purpose of the Community Kickoff Meeting was to introduce the concept of the East Rockville Neighborhood Plan, provide an opportunity for residents to become involved in the planning process, and to solicit information regarding residents' current views of the neighborhood (strengths and weaknesses) and desires for the future (threats and opportunities). Those attending were also asked to serve as volunteers on the Neighborhood Plan Advisory Group.

In May 2002, the Mayor and Council appointed volunteer members of the Neighborhood Plan Advisory Group to guide the development of the neighborhood plan. The Advisory Group consisted of neighborhood residents, one commercial property owner in the Stonestreet Study Area, and a representative of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). The Group held its first meeting in late June 2002, and met approximately every other week through Spring 2003.

The Advisory Group identified five major areas of interest and organized itself into subcommittees to address these: Stonestreet corridor, Metro, Zoning, Transportation and Environment. The subcommittees researched relevant information, conducted interviews and discussions with pertinent individuals, analyzed alternatives, and developed recommendations for their respective areas. The larger Advisory Group met bi-weekly to gather and analyze information, discuss findings of the respective subcommittees, highlight potential areas of conflict, and reach consensus on recommendations for the Plan. This process fostered considerable dialogue among the subcommittees as issues were considered.

The Advisory Group also met with the Lincoln Park Neighborhood Plan Advisory Group, which was updating its neighborhood plan. These joint meetings provided the opportunity to discuss common areas and to cooperatively resolve issues.

The Advisory Group hosted a Community Meeting at Maryvale Elementary School in March 2003 to present the Plan recommendations to the East Rockville community at large. Advisory Group members gave an overview of the Plan and outlined the recommendations of each subcommittee. Community members could discuss issues and ask questions of subcommittee members at booths that contained maps and other graphics in support of each area of interest. Feedback from the Community Meeting was primarily positive, and the Advisory Group reviewed the feedback for incorporation into the neighborhood plan.

The Advisory Group reviewed and subsequently revised the draft Neighborhood Plan in April and May 2003, and recommended a draft document for consideration by the Planning Commission and Mayor and Council, which is the subject of this public hearing.

Plan Summary

The draft Plan represents a clear vision and guide for the future of the East Rockville Neighborhood and the adjacent Stonestreet Avenue corridor. This is embodied in the Plan's goals, which are as follows:

- The East Rockville community wishes to retain its existing sense of identity as a quiet, secure, residential neighborhood.
- The East Rockville community supports the redevelopment of the Stonestreet Corridor, as defined by the East Rockville Neighborhood Plan.
- Appropriate buffers around the neighborhood must ensure the neighborhood's identity.
- All other land uses adjacent to East Rockville must enhance the community.

The Desired Framework Diagram and the Illustrative Plan (see Plan, p. 15) establish the basic concepts for the future of East Rockville, and demonstrate how these concepts can translate into new development in recommended areas. Along with the Plan's text, graphics and maps, these provide the basis for which future decisions regarding East Rockville should be made.

The Plan recommends retention of the single-family residential portion of the East Rockville neighborhood. Minimal impact from incompatible uses, such as retail and institutional uses within the community, is recommended. In addition, the adjacent industrial areas on Stonestreet Avenue should be redeveloped as a mixed-use, main street-style area that is focused on the arts and may include a science complex. The Rockville Metro station is recommended to be transformed into a community asset with a public plaza that serves as a connection to the Metro/MARC station, as well as retail and residential uses.

A quality of life issue for the community has been cut-through traffic on neighborhood streets, particularly from commercial vehicles traversing between the Southlawn area and Rockville Pike or Town Center. The Plan recommends some near-term solutions in the form of traffic calming measures, with potential long-term solutions requiring further study. The Plan also recommends ways to protect and enhance the natural environment of the neighborhood via tree canopy enhancement and stream improvements. Implementation of the Plan's recommendations will require a concerted effort on the part of many stakeholders, particularly in the Stonestreet redevelopment area. Significant capital improvements requiring public sector involvement will be necessary.

Public Outreach

At the beginning of the planning process, the entire neighborhood and the commercial property owners were invited to participate in the process and to attend the community kickoff meeting. The volunteer members of the Advisory Group were mostly derived from this initial neighborhood meeting. Once the Advisory Group was appointed and began meeting, regular public sessions were held in East Rockville at the Croydon Park Pumphouse. Periodic written and/or verbal updates were provided to the Mayor and Council and Planning Commission throughout the process. Once the Advisory Group had formulated its recommendations, another neighborhood-wide public meeting was held to solicit feedback from the neighborhood about the Advisory Group's recommendations. As with the first community-wide meeting, it was well-attended by residents.

Staff Comments

The East Rockville Neighborhood Plan was developed as a "blue sky" Plan, in that its recommendations represent the Advisory Group's ideal vision for the community. The process allowed the Group to develop its own recommendations largely unconstrained, yet the Plan as put together is a sound and achievable one.

At the Planning Commission briefing on July 23, an issue with the strong language about rezoning and ultimate removal of the neighborhood retail uses was raised by the Planning Commission and Advisory Group members. The Group wanted to clarify that the first priority for addressing these properties was enforcement of applicable zoning requirements, property maintenance codes and alcohol beverage sales laws, with rezoning of the uses as a last resort if these enforcement efforts are unsuccessful in curbing the negative effects of these uses. Suggested language endorsed by the Group will be brought forward to the Commission at the public hearing.

Staff has identified an area where additional text probably should be added to the Plan, in the Implementation Chapter. The City expects to immediately embark on a study of the Stonestreet corridor redevelopment in terms of real estate and more detailed planning. This study has already been included in the FY2004 Capital Improvements Program (CIP). This text would probably be added to the "Recommendations for Further Study" section on page 64 of the draft Plan. In addition, some refinement in the language addressing rezoning in the Stonestreet

corridor is necessary, particularly regarding the timing of the zoning changes as well as grandfathering or amortization of existing uses in the new zones.

The draft Plan was circulated to the Maryland Department of Planning and adjacent planning jurisdictions, i.e., Montgomery County and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, as required by the City's Planning enabling legislation, Article 66B of the Annotated Code of Maryland. Comments likely will be forthcoming from state agencies as a result.

Staff will provide suggested language regarding these areas, as well as a response including suggested language as appropriate, to all issues are raised at the public hearing, for discussion at the next Planning Commission meeting.

/rjw

Attachments

1. Draft East Rockville Neighborhood Plan